DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 121 694 SO 009 092

AUTHOR Underwood, Willard A.; Ferguson, Ralph E.
TITLE Changing Urbanization Trends and Human Needs in Developing African Nations.
PUB DATE Jan 76
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Western Regional Meeting of the World Population Society (Long Beach, California, January 24, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *African Culture; African History; Area Studies; *Developing Nations; Needs; Population Trends; *Rural Urban Differences; Social Problems; Tribes; Urban Culture; Urban Immigration; *Urbanization
IDENTIFIERS *Africa

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the increasing migration of African tribal members to urban centers and the resulting redefinition of cultural norms, social pressures, and human needs. First, several misconceptions about African societies are examined by briefly reviewing Africa's tribal history. Next, the phenomenon of tribalism is discussed so as to better understand African urban development. The tribe served as the social and cultrual center for earlier African societies, but cities recently are serving this function due to people moving into cities and leaving traditional tribal societies. The advent of science and technology is greatly affecting this change. Rural youth and women are especially attracted by urban life-styles and the corresponding "better" life. The numbers of people making the transition from rural to urban life-styles has surpassed many governments' abilities to regulate and serve the flow of people. Because of this inability to keep manpower in balance, urban social problems are aggravated. While village life is more relaxed and more dependent on kinship, urbanized villagers are gradually detribalized and respond more to national needs rather than tribal concerns. (Author/ND)

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CHANGING URBANIZATION TRENDS AND HUMAN NEEDS IN DEVELOPING AFRICAN NATIONS

by Willard A. Underwood
and
Ralph E. Ferguson

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the numerous misconceptions about Africa which have been created and perpetuated by social scientists (misconceptions which in turn have hampered the development of African nations) and proposes realistic methods for stimulating urban growth in developing African nations. While rural African populations are affected by the advent of science and technology, urban populations utilize these technological changes to a greater degree. Adaptation to these new technologies becomes largely a matter of time. For many reasons, people are flooding into cities and leaving traditional tribal societies. Rural youth is especially attracted by urban life styles and the corresponding "better" life. The numbers of people making the transition from rural to urban lifestyles has surpassed many governments' abilities to regulate and serve the flow of people; because of this inability to keep manpower in balance, urban social problems are further aggravated. While village life is more relaxed and more dependent upon kinship, urbanized villagers are gradually de-tribalized and respond more to national needs rather than tribal concerns.

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CHANGING URBANIZATION TRENDS AND HUMAN NEEDS IN DEVELOPING AFRICAN NATIONS

by Willard A. Underwood
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The purpose of this paper is to analyze the increasing migration of African tribal members to urban centers, and the resulting re-definition of cultural norms, social pressures and human needs. To do this effectively, we must first examine the misconceptions created about Africa by social scientists; misconceptions which have hampered the developmental potential and international understanding of African nations. Social scientists have the ability to influence change, but scholars and theorists must become more comprehensive and flexible in analyzing African concerns if these changes are to be realized. The value of social development theory is drawing to a close; the social scientist must become a realist and an activist or international decisions regarding Africa will continue to be based on misconceptions and misinformation. Techniques for solutions are now in demand; social scientists must share responsibility to actively seek these solutions and their implementation if scholarly investigation is to have real value.

Presented at the World Population Society Western Regional Meeting, Long Beach, California, January 24, 1976.

I. Misconceptions about African Societies

It is interesting that few sociologists and anthropologists have analyzed Africa's past, frequently expressing surprise at the "new" phenomenon of urban development. But half the continuum of social change is lost if one does not understand the great African societies and cultures of the past. Africa is a recycling continent, striving to rebuild her previous social systems. To appreciate the implications of urbanization in Africa, one must first understand the excellence of ancient African societies.

Contrary to what white supremacists allege and what many white Americans and Europeans believe, eighteenth and nineteenth century Africa included several highly-advanced cultures. But the African cultural heritage was suppressed to give European and American colonists a rationale for maintaining slavery and colonialism. C. Eric Lincoln explains that:

> The Europeans who came to America came in search of a new and more complete freedom; the Africans came because the last vestige of their freedom had been taken away. The Europeans came in search of new ways to exploit the full potentiality of their humanity; the Africans came under conditions which denied even their basic humanity. The children of West Africa and the sons and daughters of Europe were destined for separate roles in the making of America. For the white Europeans, America was the land of the free, where the self-evident truths of human equality were to be sufficient ground for individual liberty and universal justice; for the black African, America was to mean two hundred and fifty years of slavery. After that would come the belated discovery that even with freedom there were social and moral factors which would qualify that freedom for yet another hundred years, and more.[1]

Since America was founded on European principles, Africans in North America were prohibited from practicing and developing their culture, language, religion and family lifestyles. Denied appreciation and perpetuation, African cultures were effectively suppressed. The myth that "Africans had no culture" loses probity when one realizes that West Africans were noted for their sculpture: wood carvings,

bronzes, stone carvings and ivory work of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have greatly influenced modern Western art. Africans also developed a highly intricate system of metal work, utilizing the continent's extensive mineral ore deposits. Music and dancing were important for both social and religous purposes; the music was often complex in scale and rhythm.[2]

Individual nations achieved great stature. Basil Davidson reminds us that "the ruins of the ancient city of Meroe are among the great monuments of the ancient world, and their history is an important part of the history of man."[3] This is only one example of an urban society from Africa's past. From current literature, it might appear that Africans had no knowledge of urbanization other than those forms and ideas given them by colonists; but this ignores the oral tradition of Africa. Over 800 languages are spoken on the continent, in Nigeria alone 200 different languages developed. Lerone Bennett observes that only four African languages were written. Lincoln explains that "for the African, the spoken language is his history, his newspaper, his link to a tribe. In the local market place, oral literature developed into an elaborate tradition."[4] Thus while African cultures differed from European, the cultures were highly developed. Most Black American folklore came from this oral tradition, brought from Africa. Although these languages were not placed into written form, they were sophisticated. Linguist Mario Pei observes that Swahili, for example:

> is a complete refutation of the rather general belief that languages of "primitive" peoples are necessarily primitive, and consist largely of grunts, groans and mixed-up ideas. Swahili has a euphony that is comparable to Italian, with clear, distinct sounds, vowel endings, and a most pleasing consonant-plus-vowel. . . . Its grammatical and syntactical structure is logical, almost to the point of being philosophical.[5]

To verify the historical role of urban Africa in the ancient world, let us return to Davidson who notes that, "the ancient world had no doubt of the importance of Kush. It was a Kushite dignitary, after all, whom the apostle Philip encountered and baptized, while the Crucifixion was still yesterday's event."[6] Europeans and Americans have long considered Africa to be a poorly-developed continent, inhabited by primitive and ignorant peoples. But more recently the contributions of ancient African nations have been proclaimed to the world. Modern Ethiopia is one of the oldest nations in the world, dating back over one thousand years before the birth of Christ to a visit the Queen of Sheba (described as "black but comely") paid Solomon.[7] Bennett estimates that at least one-third of the ancient Egyptians were black, and "the only thing that can be said with assurance is that they were probably not Caucasians. The evidence suggests that they were a black-, brown-, and yellow-skinned people who sprang from a mixture of Negro, Semitic, and Caucasian stocks."[8] Carter Woodson adds that "if the Egyptians and the majority of the tribes of Northern Africa were not Negroes, then, there are no Negroes in the United States."[9] Herodotus, the "father of history," wrote that Egyptians were "black and curly haired." Several pharaohs have been identified by respected scholars as black. During the early Christian era black Africans travelled to the four corners of the earth. For several centuries, black merchants traded with India, China and Europe. Many other blacks were taken as slaves to Europe and Asia. Several prominent leaders during this period were black.

One of the first great empires of West Africa was Ghana. Ghana reached her zenith under King Tenkamenin in the eleventh century. Tenkamenin himself was not a Moslem, but he permitted Moslem traders

to establish a small town near the capitol. Under Tenkamenin's leadership, Ghana conquered the surrounding territory, ensuring the safety of the trade routes to North Africa and the Nile Valley.[10] A history of Ghana written in 1067 by the Muslim scholar Al-Bekri discusses the wealth and power of Ghana, revealing that the king of Ghana could "put two hundred thousand warriors in the field," and:

> When he gives audiences to his people . . . he sits in a pavilion around which stand his horses caparisoned in cloth of gold; behind him stand ten pages holding shields and gold-mounted swords, and on his right hand are the sons of the princes of the empire, splendidly clad and with gold plaited in their hair. The governor of the city is seated on the ground in front of the king, and all around him are his vizirs in the same position. The gate of the chamber is guarded by dogs of an excellent breed. . . . they wear collars of gold and silver, ornamented with metals.[11]

"It would be interesting to know," Basil Davidson comments, "what the Normans might have thought of Ghana. Anglo-Saxon England could easily have seemed a poor and lowly place beside it."[12]

Successor to Ghana and even greater in wealth and power was the empire of Mali, which once was a vassal state of Ghana. Emperor Mansa Kankan Musa became ruler of Mali in 1307, and made his kingdom one of the major powers of the world. Musa introduced a uniform code of laws, protected trade routes to the north and increased the stature of Timbuktu as a center of learning. In 1324 Mansa Musa made a historic pilgrimage to Mecca, described by Bennett, "he went in regal splendor with an entourage of 60,000 persons, including 12,000 servants. Five hundred slaves, each of whom carried a staff of pure gold weighing some six pounds, marched on before Musa. Eighty camels bore 24,000 pounds of gold which the black monarch distributed as alms and gifts."[13] Musa was described by Al-Omri, a scholar who lived in Cairo at the time, as "the most powerful, the richest, the most fortunate and the most feared by his enemies." Musa brought

scholars and scientists back to Mali from Egypt, to further enhance the status of the University of Timbuktu.

By 1492 the great black kingdom of Songhay had conquered most of Africa. Songhay accepted Islam reluctantly, but later through her conquests helped spread the religion throughout West Africa. Songhay flourished until modern times.

Several African nations maintained political autonomy until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when they were colonized by white Europeans. Thus when one objectively examined African history, the myth that Africans are savages and cannibals is destroyed. As Bennett concludes:

> European penetration and the slave trade debased much that was vital in African culture. The popular myth depicts the conquering white man carrying the blessings of civilization to naked savages who sat under trees, filed their teeth and waited for fruit to drop into their hands. The truth is less flattering to the European ego.[14]

There were many other great cities such as Walata, Mali city-states, Malindi and the Ashanti kingdom--the latter a federation of thirty-three tribes working together democratically for mutual development. Thus it is clear from this historical review that urbanization is not alien to African concepts, and that scholars have failed to present the extent of social change in Africa. While Africa as a continent <u>is</u> largely under-developed technologically today, especially when compared with European and American standards, as one gets deeper into the study of Africa it is easier to locate the specific problems of contemporary African societies.

II. Changing Urbanization Trends

An understanding of the phenomenon of tribalism is vital to understanding urban African development. The tribe, much as the forts of the nineteenth-century American West, served as social and cultural centers for earlier African societies. In the Old West, settlers went to the fort for protection and social functions; the tribe fulfills similar needs in African societies. Bohannan explains:

> The word tribe, when applied to African peoples, certainly refers to something far different than does the same word when it is applied to North American Indians of the seventeenth century or to the Australian aborigines of the nineteenth century. Some African tribes are what have been described as village states; others are empires of several million people spread over hundreds of thousands of square miles. Some African tribes are language groups; some others are congeries of indefinite or indiscriminate groups that have been classified together under a term, usually pejorative, by their neighbors. Probably the classic case is to be found in the Northern Territories of Ghana, where some of the so-called tribal names that were meticulously recorded by early administrators and students turn out to be no more than derisive terms for culture traits that have come from one direction or the other, while the peoples of the area refer to themselves by names that take their referents from local places and who, in fact, have scarcely any organized groups larger than the ordinary homesite or compound.[15]

From this more detailed explanation of tribes, the many facets of this form of society can be seen. If one can put the urban model beside the tribal model, similarities between the two become obvious. These similarities are important if one is to understand the development of modern urbanized Africa. No one has conducted an in-depth analysis of tribalism. Sociologists, anthropologists and missionaries have too often studied African peoples to prove their own pre-conceived ideas. With this self-serving motivation, these early "social scientists" found adequate information to support their half-truths. While analysts today are more open and objective, the damage has been done. Africans still are adversely affected by the ignorance of col-

onialists who pour millions of dollars into developing specified areas of "under-development" while continuing to exploit the peoples. Africans have been placed in the position where they must either take money for ineffective programs or lose foreign aid altogether. Bohannan describes the justifications of early anthropologists who contributed to this dilemma:

> The anthropologists wanted the Africans straightened out for their own reasons. For better or for worse, they, being dedicated to the useful proposition that cultures are to be considered as wholes, carried their concern a step farther than it should have gone. Many of them--by no means all--figured that whole cultures took up space from which other groups were excluded. They explained and then disregarded the interdigitation; they disregarded foreign fishing villages set into the midst of farming communities. They disregarded nomads who crossed and recrossed the territories of settled peoples. All were reduced to maps and, on most maps, all were given exclusive territories.[16]

Many erroneous premises were endorsed by these anthropologists, who failed to recognize the intricate cultural patterns of Africa. Until the 1950s, with the writings of Herskovits, few genuine attempts were made to understand Africa; thus most foreign aid was offered by people who did not really understand the natives. While the cultural anthropologists opened the eyes of the world to Africa's existence, half-truths and misconceptions were offered to shroud these studies in misinformation. Every society, whether developed or underdeveloped, has had problems with colonialism, socialism, tribalism, traditionalism or some other form of "-ism." Thus these early studies might best be reanalyzed to discover new truths about Africa. As Meister suggests, the science and technology of our industrial countries of course conquer under-development and I am not questioning their contributions and potential. But science and technology are above social phenomena, manipulated by men according to their needs and interests."[17]

The knowledge necessary to provoke social change in Africa lies within science and technology. Some may question the use of this knowledge on the assumption that change will come too rapidly if it is used; this is the premise put forth by many scholars who believe that rural tribal people could not endure the mental transition. But while the rural population is definitely affected by change, it is the urban population which through association utilizes the instruments of change. The immediate effects are on those who desire change for development and industrialization to benefit all, including both rural and urban groups. Third-world peoples are not retarded; they simply need adequate stimulation for the creative minority to enlighten the stagnant majority. It tends to be a universal truth that people change as their needs and interests are re-defined. Those individuals who refuse the process come gradually to accept it as they adopt technological advances which make their work simpler or easier, and as their lifestyles resultantly become more personally attractive. Adaptation then becomes a matter of time, as changes in many other nations indicates.

The techniques for effective social change do not lie entirely within underdeveloped countries. Development of urban centers is deeply woven into the economic law of supply and demand, which protects the eliteness of mechanized societies. For example, during the Industrial Revolution in England the vast majority of people were uneducated, similar to the peoples now seeking to enter the urban centers of Africa. Seeking a better life or a higher standard of living, these people come to the cities for different lifestyles. This same situation occurred during the guild age of industrialization in the United States.

There is no fundamental difference between European/American and African development other than the factor of color. But this one factor has been used to shroud the realities of the rural-to-urban transition because it is beneficial to the technologically-advanced societies of the world to maintain such an international facade. This facade prevents the "liberal and progressive" countries from appearing to be what they actually are in the international scene--exploiting and hypocritical. For other progressive countries, the facade allows them to perpetuate international racism on the premise that it is the best policy for everyone involved. Others use the facade to manipulate political and economic gains by influencing suppressionist colonial groups to continue present diplomatic relations. These are the opportunists who may not halt progress, but retard it severely.

The proper application of science and technology in the under-developed countries of Africa would steer the white South African toward a totally different social policy. It would also influence a different policy toward Africa from the Portugese colonists. The knowledge for change is available, but it is economically disadvantageous for many non-African nations to apply this knowledge in Africa. It is much easier for intellectuals to make it appear that application is impossible; but every society in the world develops an energetically creative micro-continuum which later stimulates the revolutionary macro-continuum for the masses. Only in Africa and other under-developed areas has it become suddenly necessary to reverse the order of social change. As Balandier notes:

> In the urban areas one can note the social change occurring in Africa. It is difficult to imagine from a distance the consequences for the individual of a situation which involves not only the confusion of a society in transition, but the competitiveness of a crude and primitive mercantilism.[18]

For many reasons, people are flooding into the cities and leaving traditional tribal societies behind. Today very little of Africa is remote, due to the network of roads which link the large urban centers. These roads allow easy access for rural people into urban areas. The rural youth are especially attracted by the urban lifestyles, and frequently forsake the villages for a "better life" in the cities. Those who remain in the rural area trade their crafts for materials, objects and money. One of the most popular technological objects is the radio, as in Senegal. The government of Senegal has organized broadcasting programs during the day in seven of the principal dialects of the nation. The government of Senegal conducted the Kamian survey to measure the effects of radio on the people and language in rural areas; this is one example of the creative minority stimulating the pace of social change.

Other nations are also busy enlightening their rural people that they might enter the cities and take advantage of developing labor markets. The biggest problem confronted in this transition is that governments cannot control the flow of people into urban centers. Because of this inability to keep supply and demand of manpower in balance, social problems are aggravated.

It is rare for an African to enter the urban areas without knowing residents, thus the urbanized African retains some tribal influences. Nevertheless, the city produces cultural shock; in most cases, it is the individual's first exposure to many different behavioral patterns not found within the norms of his tribe. To counter-act this urban shock, the rural African relies upon the security afforded by urbanized members of his tribe. Thus the urban tribe serves as a cushion for rural youth seeking permanent residence in the city. The system of kinship thus provides an

element of stability in the urban development of Africa. Through this phenomenon a labor market is available for the newcomer to pursue.

As the male tribal member adapts to the urban life style, many other social changes occur. This individual becomes, in many instances, an unskilled laborer and eventually a migrant worker. Urbanized, he moves from city to city as his work dictates. As a migrant, he occasionally returns to his "home" village for traditional tribal celebrations or to visit his wife or to seek a wife. Village visits have no discernable pattern, but as work opportunities create distance between village and city for the individual male, his visits to the village become less frequent. At this point, the individual is completely urbanized; he no longer needs the rural security, but instead finds companionship in the cross-cultural aspects of the city. In many instances, as found in Liberia, his associations with other people are determined by economics. The tribal identity gradually becomes secondary to the national identity. For this reason, one finds inter-tribal marriages within the urban areas; outside the urban environment, inter-tribal marriages are viewed as inter-racial marriages would be treated in the United States.

The role of the urbanized woman has also experienced great social redefinition, as Cohen reports:

> All the prostitutes are former housewives who have either divorced their husbands, been divorced by them, or run away from them. . . . Womanhood is a social status and a female acquires it only on marriage. Marriage is thus the rite of passage from childhood to womanhood. If, after divorce a woman remains single, she will be called Karuma, or prostitute. The passage from wifehood to prostitution after divorce is not automatic. A divorced woman who does not immediately practice prostitution and remains at home, with her parents or other relatives is called Bazawara, which means literally a formerly married woman who is currently not married. But if the Bazawara does not marry within a short period of time and if she begins to go out of the house in daylight she becomes known as a prostitute.

> . . . prostitution does not carry the same stigma which it does in Western or in some other societies. The Hansa Karuwa is idealized in the culture as a woman of strong character, intelligent, and highly entertaining.[19]

This is one concept of the female role from the Sabo society of northern Nigeria. This view is not accepted by every African society, but the principles are encouraged by the social changes within the urban sectors. The woman is a stabilizer in the urban society; once she is in the city, she rarely returns to the village. Most migrants to the city are single men, or men who have lost their wives due to the migration. Developing cities have a majority of men and, because of this fact, the law of supply and demand loses probity. Because of natural environmental influences, it is possible for an African woman to marry three or four times before menopause.

Analyzing the models carefully, it is easier to understand how a rural tribal person is detribalized and how the breakdown of sectional tribalism affects the role of the urban woman. Though the urban tribal leaders may attempt to confine women to certain sections of the city, this is impossible--especially if she is earning her livlihood as a prostitute. Thus the norms of the tribe become secondary to survival. It seems that the men return to the village to find a wife but the women, once in the city, seldom return to the village.

An essential element in maintaining urban tribalism, urban socio-economic pressures make individual <u>success</u> more important than welfare of the tribe. The city is different because everyone works from a competetive basis, rather than cooperatively, as in the village.

In any underdeveloped country, those people who leave the rural area become a part of the growth of urban theory. This attitude is discussed by Desmond Morris in The Human Zoo. The changes which have occurred in urban Africa are normal: urban politics is not created to do that which is good, but to do that which is necessary for preservation. Leaders may take advantage of the situation for their own advancement; a strong military becomes necessary to maintain conditions. The military is necessary to curb possible insurrection at the lower status levels; insurrection could hinder future developments. The people must be aware of controls if they are to avoid manipulation by the government; government may slow the pace of social change to retain controls.

Africans are very conscious of freedom in rural modes, but technical urban society tends to redefine the concept. Leaders of emerging Africa are caught in the syndrome of colonial determinism: any official governmental decisions of international consequence are influenced by the economic power of the colonial government. Freedom becomes politically expendable and superficial, a fact the people realize. This form of governmental relationship creates conflict within the country. Some leaders, such as Toure and Nyreyre, denounce colonial groups because of imperialist policies; but this position creates a different problem--refusing aid from wealthy nations through fear of domination could provoke internal power struggles and thus further hamper industrialization. Thus the additional concept of freedom through colonial determinism can and does hamper the complete development of a nation. Ellul comments that:

> freedom consists of overcoming and transcending these determinisms. Freedom is completely without meaning unless it is related to necessity, unless it represents victory over necessity. . . . Freedom is not static but dynamic; not a vested interest, but a prize continually to be won. . . . He is most enslaved when he thinks he is comfortably settled in freedom.[20]

The underdeveloped countries have a symbolic freedom which appears impressive to the world. Actually, these countries are economically and politically manipulated because of the loans they must pay to other nations. These countries do not need the international market which traditional politics advocates. Rather, underdeveloped countries are sufficiently advanced now to become a society within themselves; such a society of third-world nations could better understand developmental needs and end exploitation by elite countries of the world.

We are not suggesting a radical plan. Africa is a normal continent which faces the same problems which perplexed Europe in her development; like Europe, Africa can turn inward and form a strong common market. One might argue that this is impractical because of the numerous tribes and languages, but Europe has never been an unilingual continent. Leading intellectuals have created such a myth about African development that educated Africans themselves have doubted their own abilities. Those who don't accept the European/American myth about African development use their knowledge for personal advantage. When Africans come to realize that Pan-Africanism is unrealistic, they can achieve total development and total independence. Africans realistically have the resources to build their own technological societies; the myth that more capable people are needed from other countries is merely another technique for misdirecting African thinking. As an African student commented;

> My life is between two worlds, each of which has a hold on me. The first world is the world of civilization (embodied by the school and college environment), and the other is the world of the past represented by my home life amidst the proud and conservative Masai who have not yet taken to Western ways. . . . When I go home on leave now I find it difficult to associate with youths of my age. . . . They can not tolerate a half-Masai. All the same I understand their pride and stick to them through thick and thin.[21]

This represents a critical element in regard to detribalization and urbanization. For a man to receive an education, he need not sacrifice his cultural heritage. Instead, his knowledge should stimulate others of his tribe to become involved in the African Industrial Revolution. Similarly, one need not renounce his tribal associations to become urbanized; the individual African may acquire a high degree of aculturated sophistication, which enables him to commute comfortably between cultures.

FOOTNOTES

Willard A. Underwood (Ph.D., Bowling Green State University, 1972) is Assistant Professor of Speech and Theatre, Arizona State University, Tempe. Ralph E. Ferguson is candidate for a master's degree in Public Administration at the University of Southern California.

[1]C. Eric Lincoln, The Negro Pilgrimage in America (New York, 1967), p. 2.

[2]Lincoln, The Black Americans (New York, 1969), pp. 3-4.

[3]Basil Davidson, The Lost Cities of Africa (Boston, 1970), p. 36.

[4]Lincoln, Black Americans, p. 3.

[5]Lerone Bennett, Jr., Before the Mayflower (Baltimore, 1966), p. 25.

[6]Davidson, p. 40.

[7]Bennett, p. 11.

[8]Pp. 6-7.

[9]P. 7.

[10]Lincoln, Black Americans, p. 5.

[11]Bennett, p. 17.

[12]P. 13.

[13]P. 17.

[14]P. 23.

[15]Paul Bohannan, African Outline (Baltimore, 1964), p. 122.

[16]P. 122.

[17]Albert Meister, East Africa: The Past in Chains, the Future in Pawn (New York, 1968), p. 243.

[18]Georges Balandier, Ambiguous Africa (New York, 1966), p. 194.

[19]Abner Cohen, Custom and Politics in Urban Africa (Berkeley, 1969), p. 55.

[20]Jacques Ellul, The Technological Society (New York, 1964), p. 33.

[21]Philip J. Foster, Africa South of the Sahara (Boston, 1968), p. 11.